

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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President Obama Statement on U.N. Rights Council LGBT	1
Assad Regime, Not Protesters, Destabilizing Syria, U.S. Says	1
U.S., EU Consider Code of Conduct for Space	2
High Prices Threaten Food Security	2
U.S. Military Unveils Ambitious Energy Strategy	3

President Obama Statement on U.N. Rights Council LGBT

Resolution

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
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Statement by the President on the UN Human Rights Council Resolution on Human Rights, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Today, for the first time in history, the United Nations adopted a resolution dedicated to advancing the basic human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons. This marks a significant milestone in the long struggle for equality, and the beginning of a universal recognition that LGBT persons are endowed with the same inalienable rights -- and entitled to the same protections -- as all human beings. The United States stands proudly with those nations that are standing up to intolerance, discrimination, and homophobia. Advancing equality for LGBT persons should be the work of all peoples and all nations. LGBT persons are entitled to equal treatment, equal protection, and the dignity that comes with being full members of our diverse societies. As the United Nations begins to codify and enshrine the promise of equality for LGBT persons, the world becomes a safer, more respectful, and more humane place for all people.

Assad Regime, Not Protesters, Destabilizing Syria, U.S. Says

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. officials condemned the Syrian government's continued violence against its citizens as "appalling repression," and said the government led by Bashar al-Assad is destabilizing the country with its security forces and is putting Syria on a path to becoming a pariah state.

Speaking via teleconference from Washington June 17, a senior State Department official who asked not to be identified said the Syrian people are "demanding their legitimate rights — rights that been denied for 30 years," and for the past three months have been voicing their frustration at the Assad regime's corruption, repression and the abuses by its secret police.

The Assad government has blamed both outside terrorism and sectarian motives as explanations for the unrest, but the official said, "What we've seen develop is that the regime itself and its repression are the sources of the instability."

The official said the Assad government is "exacerbating the sectarian tensions on the ground by the very actions that they're taking," and that U.S. officials have noticed an "interesting phenomenon" where protests turn violent only when security services are present.

June 17 saw assaults and shootings in some parts of Syria, with reports of 19 dead, while protests were allowed to occur peacefully in Hama and in suburbs of Damascus.

"Where the security services have pulled out, the demonstrations are peaceful," the official said. "While we don't discount the fact that there have been sometimes demonstrators that shoot on the security services, what starts this momentum is when the security services themselves seem to initiate the violence, based on what we've seen on the ground today."

Since the violence against the protesters began, the United States has issued sanctions against top Syrian officials, including President Assad, and on entities such as the Quds Force of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps. The official said Iran has been supporting the Syrian government's crackdown with advice and equipment.

The European Union has also imposed sanctions, and the U.N. Human Rights Council has called for an investigation into human rights abuses. In recent days, Turkey and Arab League Secretary-General Amr Moussa have also condemned Syria's actions. The official said the growing international response indicates that "by the actions he's taking, Assad is putting his country clearly on the path to become a pariah state."

The international community seeks to support the Syrian peoples' demands for universal rights and the start of a political transition from its closed one-party structure, the official said.

"The Syrian people themselves are the ones that are driving the agenda, that are making the demands, that are expressing their views, that are reacting to the repression," the official said.

In response to the violence, more than 8,000 Syrians have fled to Turkey. The official said the Obama administration is in close contact with the Turkish government and is "prepared to be responsive to ... any request that the Turkish government may make of us or to ask our help with the international community to respond."

A second senior official said the Obama administration is considering additional measures to increase pressure on the Syrian regime, such as evaluating whether its actions constitute war crimes and could be referred to international judicial bodies. Also under consideration are "additional economic steps, and one in particular has to

do with the oil and gas sector in Syria," the official said.

The United States has worked with France and the United Kingdom on a U.N. Security Council resolution on Syria. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton telephoned Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov earlier June 17 to discuss how they could work together to get a resolution passed.

"Discussions continue in New York ... [and] we're working individually with the various members of the U.N. Security Council on a text," Nuland said. "The secretary's diplomacy today with Foreign Minister Lavrov was in support of that resolution effort, and the work continues."

In Geneva June 17, Ambassador Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe, the U.S. representative to the U.N. Human Rights Council, told reporters the council had met to follow up on a special April 29 session in which it condemned Syria's violent response to peaceful protests and called for an investigation into human rights abuses.

The Human Rights Council "had a follow-up action in this session to further reinforce and put pressure on the Assad regime, that the atrocities there have to halt," Donahoe said. "I think it's very significant that we continue to be able to put pressure on the Assad regime and that cross-regionally we've got widespread understanding that they've lost legitimacy and that they are going to be held responsible for the atrocities that are taking place there."

U.S., EU Consider Code of Conduct for Space

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington — The United States is reviewing a European Union-proposed code of conduct for space activities as a mechanism to strengthen security, safety and sustainability for that vast area beyond the bounds of Earth.

Representatives from the U.S. departments of State and Defense were in Prague June 12-14 discussing the possibilities with government, security and space experts from other nations at a meeting hosted by the European Space Policy Institute and the Prague Security Studies Institute.

Coming to a shared understanding of what "space security" means is a starting point, said Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Space and Defense Policy Frank A. Rose. He explained how the United States defines the term: "the pursuit of those activities that ensure the sustainability, stability and free access to, and use of, outer space in support of a nation's vital interests."

More and more nations have "vital interests" in space, as satellites have becoming increasingly important tools in wireless telephone service, broadcast media and scientific planetary observations. In a recent article, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy Gregory L. Schulte wrote that 1,100 active systems and 21,000 pieces of debris up there have made space "increasingly congested, competitive and contested."

Rose said the February 2009 collision between a commercial satellite and an inoperable Russian military satellite served as a stimulus in opening an international discussion about a code of conduct for space activities. Both Rose and Schulte say that it is in the interest of all nations to help prevent "mishaps, misperceptions and mistrust."

Rose told participants in the Prague meeting that the United States is taking a number of steps to show responsibility and transparency in its space activities: working on how to avoid space object collisions, improving the protection of space systems and infrastructures, and strengthening measures to reduce the hazard of orbital debris.

The European Union issued its proposal for a code of conduct May 31. Rose said the EU proposal is consistent with U.S. support for "responsible actions in, and the peaceful use of, space," and he added that the United States is weighing whether to initiate formal talks with the EU and other interested nations on a code of conduct for space. In the meantime, he said, the United States is involved in multilateral talks on space activity organized under the auspices of the United Nations, and is hopeful these discussions will lead to measures that solve existing problems.

High Prices Threaten Food Security

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer

Washington — The outlook for world agricultural output and food supplies is positive in the near future, but several years out, the *Agricultural Outlook 2011-2020* report projects higher prices and persistent volatility in commodity supplies and prices.

Released June 17 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the report says that a good harvest this season will translate into lower prices on commodities from some of the highs seen earlier in the year. But over the ensuing decade, prices for grains are projected to rise 20 percent, and for meat as much as 30 percent.

"Prolonged periods of high prices could make the achievement of global food security goals more difficult, putting poor consumers at a higher risk of malnutrition,"

according to the report summary.

But thoughtful policies and the proper investments from governments could forestall shortages and malnutrition, according to FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf. "The key solution to the problem will be boosting investment in agriculture and reinforcing rural development in developing countries, where 98 percent of the hungry people live today and where population is expected to increase by 47 percent over the next decades," Diouf said.

Rising prices have a positive side for food producers, if not for consumers. The prospect of strong prices can serve as a signal to the agriculture sector that investments in improved productivity and expanded output are worthwhile, the report says.

The uncertain prospects for food security in the future do not come as a surprise to experts in this field. Two years ago, at a G8 summit in Italy, leaders learned of the potential for difficulties ahead, and committed to "act with the scale and urgency needed to achieve sustainable global food security." A World Summit on Food Security in 2009 also highlighted the needs and adopted a set of principles to guide future action.

In the United States, the Obama administration has responded with the Feed the Future initiative, which emphasizes the need to work in partnership internationally.

"Food security must remain high on the agenda of global, regional, and national fora to catalyze the equitable poverty reduction necessary for sustained impact," according to a summary of the initiative. The administration has committed at least \$3.5 billion to agricultural development and food security over three years, and that stake has attracted support from other donors totaling more than \$18.5 billion.

Investing in small-scale farms to increase their yields and improve their access to markets is one of the key strategies of the plan. The overarching goal is to cut in half by 2015 the number of people living in extreme poverty and suffering hunger.

One billion people, a sixth of the world's population, experience chronic hunger, and more than 3.5 million children die each year from malnutrition. Millions more fail to thrive, growing to adulthood with diminished physical or mental capabilities that inhibit their potential and what they may contribute to their families, their communities and their nations.

U.S. Military Unveils Ambitious Energy Strategy

By Andrzej Zwanecki | Staff Writer

Washington — The Pentagon is calling for dramatic cuts in the U.S. military's energy consumption and a revised look at the impact of energy use on combat effectiveness.

A new plan identifies three main areas of concern: reducing consumption on the battlefield, expanding the use of alternative energy sources and building more energy-efficient vehicles and weapons systems.

The Defense Department has been experimenting for years with synthetic fuels, renewable energy and energy-efficiency projects. But in a plan released June 14, it spells out for the first time a broad strategy and identifies energy as a war-fighting capability.

"The way we build energy into our operations is a core part of fighting and winning the nation's wars," Deputy Secretary of Defense William Lynn said at a briefing that day.

As the single largest U.S. consumer of energy, the Pentagon has been under increasing pressure to reduce its energy bill — around \$15 billion in 2010 — as the government faces tough budgetary choices and the price of petroleum rises. Today the Pentagon spends 225 percent more on gasoline than a decade ago, according to department officials. Greater-than-ever reliance on fuels and electricity has not only considerably increased costs of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also exposed military personnel and supply lines to enemy attacks, according to defense officials. Lynn said that cutting energy costs and boosting fighting capability are interconnected goals.

"The less [energy] we need, the more operationally resilient we will be," he said. "We will increase military effectiveness while lowering our costs."

Sharon Burke, assistant secretary of defense, said a reduced demand for energy can mean better range and better endurance for U.S. forces deployed to war zones.

Other considerations also played a significant role in shaping the strategy. Because the strategy considers a disruption of petroleum supplies "increasingly likely in the coming decades," it urges greater diversification of energy consumed by the U.S. military and greater reliance on renewable and synthetic fuels.

In the near term, the department plans to help commanders better manage their energy needs and retrofit U.S. air, ground and naval fleets to make them more energy-efficient. In the medium term, it intends to introduce energy efficiency and other energy

requirements into acquisition programs for new equipment and weapons systems, Burke said. More specific initiatives and timelines will be released later this year.

But in the long run, Lynn said, innovation can make the greatest impact on the Pentagon and on overall U.S. energy policy. In the past, a number of inventions, including the Internet and GPS, were developed for the military and then adopted for civilian use. Military investments in new energy technologies, including renewables, are likely to have a substantial impact on clean energy industries and can bring down the costs of renewable and other alternative technologies, according to a June report by Pike Research, a market research and consulting firm.

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